



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council

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Town Clerk (860)441-6640
Town Manager
(860)441-6630

Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Heather Sherman Bond, Kathryn M. Brown-Tracy, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter

Monday, March 31, 2008

7:00 PM

Groton Senior Center, Route 117

FYE 2009 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

I. ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Mayor Harry Watson.

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter

Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent, Superintendent of Schools Dr. James Mitchell, Director of Administrative Services Doug Ackerman, Finance Director Sal Pandolfo, Board of Education Vice Chairman Chaz Zzulka, Board of Education Business Manager Hugh Hunter, Members Elizabeth Gianacoplos, Archie Swindell, Brian Shirvell, Rita Volkmann, and Patricia Doyle, Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds Wes Greenleaf, eight RTM members, Deputy Town Clerk Janet Downs, and Office Assistant Lori Watrous.

II. INTRODUCTION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

Elected officials introduced themselves at the request of Mayor Watson.

III. READING OF PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

The Notice of Public Hearing pursuant to a resolution passed by the Town Council was read by Deputy Town Clerk Janet Downs.

IV. BUDGET PRESENTATIONS

a. Town Manager

Town Manager Mark Oefinger presented a summary of the proposed Town budget for fiscal year 2009.

b. Superintendent of Schools

Superintendent Dr. James Mitchell and BOE Finance Committee Chairman Brian Shirvell presented a summary of the Board of Education Budget. Mr. Shirvell also addressed concerns regarding the color printing of the Board of Education budget book.

Dr. Mitchell is retiring soon and Mayor Watson publicly expressed the Town's appreciation for all his years of service.

V. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Salute to the Flag was led by Mayor Harry Watson.

VI. OPENING OF PUBLIC HEARING

Mayor Watson called the FYE 2009 Budget Public Hearing to order at 8:33 p.m. The Mayor stated that due to the number of citizens speaking, each speaker would be limited to three minutes.

The Mayor received an email from Scott Meyer, 75 Midway Oval, in support of the Community Policing Program and the Maritime Academy.

Mayor Watson also received an email from Lisa Gernhard, 75 Midway Oval, in support of the Community Policing Program.

Richard Cady, 36 Island View Avenue, Mystic, urged the Town Council to take measures to cut the budget. He realizes that major cuts hurt and can be distasteful; nevertheless they should be made. Mr. Cady also expressed his desire to enable taxpayers to vote on the budget, and would like to see a strong mayor form of government in Groton.

Christie Williams, 5 Allyn's Alley, Mystic, remarked that the Mystic Arts Cafe is a recipient of the Dorothy Mullen Arts and Humanities Award, which honors the most innovative and effective arts and humanities programs across the nation. Programs offered have included literary readings by poets and writers, as well as many diverse genres of music, including opera, classical, jazz and rock. As director, Mr. Williams announced that the proposed funding cut from \$6,000 to \$1,000 will drastically reduce the scope and number of programs that the Arts Cafe will be able to offer, and urges the Town to reinstate the funding level.

Betsey Fox, 25 New London Road, Mystic, expressed her support for the Arts Cafe, noting that it is a diligent program with dedicated staff. Through the encouragement students receive, young poets have an opportunity to find their artistic voice. Ms. Fox asked for the continued funding of the Arts Cafe.

Julie Maisch, 60 Colony Road, is in support of the Eastern Connecticut Symphony's request for \$3,000 to be used for its fall concert. Groton residents make up a majority of the attendees, as well as belonging to the chorus, friends of the orchestra, and members of the youth orchestra. She believes that the area is enhanced by the symphony.

Ed Ettinger, 174 Cedar Road, Mystic, stated that the increases in the budget are not sustainable year after year. He urged the Town Council to take control by instituting hiring freezes, reducing the school budget by the operating costs of the two closed schools, and seeking reimbursement from the federal government for the educational costs of children living in Navy housing as it is a non-taxed government property.

Kit Talbot, 10 Florence Drive, Mystic, expressed appreciation for the rowing and paddling programs based at Beebe Cove in Noank. The club is run mainly by volunteers, with support from the Parks and Recreation Department. Currently, club memberships and storage fees do not cover the cost of a part-time coordinator or the maintenance and storage of the docks. Ms. Talbot requested seed money for a part-time coordinator for one year, and asked that the Town maintain and store the docks as it would other Town equipment.

Wanda Tillman, 925 River Road, Mystic, requested \$3,000 for the Eastern Connecticut Symphony. The present conductor is leaving and his final concert is April 2008. Applicants for this position have been narrowed down to six individuals, and it is important that potential conductors see community support for the symphony.

Gretchen Higgins, 292 West Shore Avenue, Groton Long Point, lends her support to the Arts Cafe. She can't imagine it disappearing, as they have wonderful poets and musical programs. Ms. Higgins would like to see the funding restored to \$6,000.

John Sutherland, 32 Neptune Drive, expressed concern over increased taxes and expenditures. He presented a chart that highlighted trends in costs and spending. Mr. Sutherland urged the Council to reduce expenditures because the property tax burden is unsustainable in the long-term.

Melanie Greenhouse, 23 Brook Street, Noank, supports the Arts Cafe and is disappointed with the proposed cuts to this program. Poets and writers of the highest caliber come to the Arts Cafe, and

while she respects the work that goes into the preparation of a budget, \$6,000 is a small fraction of the total budget. Ms. Greenhouse requested the Town Council to stand behind this program.

Kevin Trejo, 536 Shennecossett Road, expressed appreciation for the efforts that have resulted in a reasonable budget, and supports both the Town and the Board of Education budgets. He further requested that the Town Council look at the Human Services area of the budget, as there are no changes in salary or overtime figures. Case loads are increasing and he is concerned that case workers will be overloaded. Mr. Trejo would also like to see the Town's legal expenditures at a lower level.

Lea Kennedy, 152 Cedar Road, Mystic, supports the Board of Education budget as both an educator and a parent. Ms. Kennedy agrees with Mr. Sutherland that cost reductions should be made, but does not think that those cuts should be in the Arts Cafe or by cutting teachers.

The Mayor received a letter from Joanie DiMartino, 21 Jackson Drive, in support of the Mystic Arts Cafe.

Dave Williams, 129 Elm Street, Noank, expressed the importance of advocating for the Arts Cafe. Students participating in the Student Laureate Program return to their schools having good things to say about the programs at the Arts Cafe. Mr. Williams thinks that there should be no decrease in funding for this program.

Genevieve Cerf, 17 Crescent Street, expressed her concern that the continued increase in the budget is not sustainable by the population of the Town. She urges the Town Council to make radical changes. Ms. Cerf supports the Arts Cafe, and stated that the extra \$3,500 spent on the color printing of the Board of Education budget books could have gone to the Arts Cafe program.

The Mayor received a letter from Theresa Lamb, 305 South Road, urging the Town to cut the budget to a zero percent increase.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Harry Watson declared the meeting closed at 9:19 p.m.

Attest:

*Barbara Tarbox, Town Clerk
Clerk of the Council*

Lori Watrous, Office Assistant